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ABSTRACT

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve further education (FE) in the United Kingdom, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) developed a model for FE colleges that see their core purpose as meeting the needs of business and industry as distinct form colleges with a mission to serve the needs of the community or prepare young people for higher education. LSDA then worked with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in Sussex, England, to jointly develop the concept of a college for business. The following distinctive dimensions of activity were identified as important within the college for business: (1) acting as a gateway to the workplace; (2) adaptation and updating; (3) problem solving and innovation; (4) support networks for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and (5) an underpinning mission and infrastructure to support implementation of the model. Tests of the model at three pilot colleges in Sussex confirmed the effectiveness of the "college for business" model, the value of using an audit instrument developed by LSDA to audit current provision and services, and the importance of each of the dimensions within the model. After the pilot tests, the Sussex LSC continued efforts to transform their network, adding four additional colleges to the initiative. (The audit tool and an introduction to the series are appended. Nineteen endnotes are included.) (MN)

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SUSSEX DOWNS COLLEGE

Learning+Skills Council Sussex

learning and skills development agency

a basis for skills

developing the 'college for business' in Sussex

Maria Hughes
and Geoff Stanton

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Sussex LSC are further progressing the modernisation of their provider network. We wish them well in the challenging undertaking of transforming the culture of FE colleges to meet the demands of the skills agenda.

This publication is part of the LSDA collection *A basis for skills*. Each publication is available separately and the overview is on the LSDA website www.LSDA.org.uk in *Briefing*.

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Feedback should be sent to:
Information Services
Learning and Skills Development Agency
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS.
Tel 020 7297 9144
Fax 020 7297 9242
enquiries@LSDA.org.uk

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Further information

For further information about the issues discussed in this publication please contact:

Maria Hughes
Research Manager
Learning and Skills Development Agency.
Tel 020 7297 9118
mhughes@LSDA.org.uk

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Summary

- A central role of the FE sector is to develop the workforce of today and prepare the workforce of tomorrow. The sector must therefore be both grounded in contemporary concerns and mindful of future needs.
- Further education serves a wide range of clients, whose needs may not all be compatible. Recent thinking about how further education is organised and delivered has suggested that it may not be possible to reconcile all these needs in every college. *Success for all*[1] reflects this thinking and proposes greater differentiation of mission.
- The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has been exploring the shape and implications of greater specialisation in the types of organisations that develop and deliver vocational education and training. The concept of the 'college for business' emerged from LSDA's policy development work and describes a model for colleges that see their core purpose as meeting the needs of business and industry, as distinct from colleges with a mission to serve the needs of the community, or to prepare young people for higher education.
- The Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and LSDA have since worked together to develop the concept of the college for business further, and to pilot its implementation in three colleges.[2]
- Five distinctive dimensions of activity are suggested as important within the college for business:
  - **gateway to the workplace:** where initial knowledge and skills are developed. This may be defined by age, ie provision for 14–19 year olds on college or work-based programmes, but it could also include provision for HE graduates and returners to the workforce
  - **adaptation and updating:** providing training for the current workforce to acquire new processes and adaptation
  - **problem-solving and innovation**: developing services to accelerate innovation or solve business problems
  - **support networks for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):** to support the exchange of ideas and good practice
  - **an underpinning mission and infrastructure:** to support the implementation of the model.
- The colleges in the Sussex LSC pilot have audited their provision against the criteria for colleges for business and as a result, the original concepts have been tested and extended.
- Sussex LSC are moving forward with the transformation of their network. Four more colleges have joined the initiative, so that all the general FE colleges in Sussex LSC are now working towards becoming a college for business, each with defined specialisms relating to the LSC's skills priorities.

Key findings

The work with the pilot colleges in Sussex has:

- confirmed the value of auditing current provision and services using the audit instrument developed by LSDA and informed the fine-tuning of the audit tool
- confirmed the importance of each of the dimensions within the 'college for business' model
- revealed that the dimensions of **problem-solving and innovation** and **support networks for SMEs** are the least well developed, but suggested that they have potential benefits for the college as well as for client companies, in that:
  - involvement in problem-solving and innovation could be an effective form of professional development for college staff
  - **networks of SMEs** can enable the marketing and provision of training to become viable
- indicated that each dimension complements and enhances the others. For instance:
  - **support for innovation** may generate a subsequent need for programmes of **adaptation and updating**
  - staff involvement in support work with companies appears to enable them to improve retention and achievement on **gateway** provision
- identified the relative benefits and risks associated with different methods of conducting the audit and the subsequent action-planning.

Problems and difficulties

- Despite the effectiveness of the model and the audit instrument, there were problems. Misunderstanding of the 'colleges for business' concept led to the tendency, particularly among staff and managers who were not centrally involved in the project, to equate 'colleges for business' solely with the provision of full-cost, short courses for employers. Linked to this, it was sometimes thought that business development units could be given the sole responsibility for the necessary developments.
- Staff who had spent the past few years being pressed to deliver full-time courses for 16–19 year olds more efficiently and effectively, often in competition with local sixth forms, sometimes felt that the shift in focus suggested by the 'college for business' concept might distract from this, and even damage the progress they had made. Because the 'college for business' concept required changes in both mindsets and procedures, it could be difficult for staff to keep the definition and focus clear under the day-to-day pressures of current college activity.
- The same pressures made it difficult to find the necessary time to:
  - raise the awareness of staff across the college
  - conduct the audit
  - prepare a development plan and ensure that it formed part of the overall college planning procedures.

- The audit instrument seemed daunting at first sight, and help was needed in interpreting it.

Addressing the issues

The following points were important in addressing these issues:

- regular reiteration that the 'college for business' concept is not solely concerned with developing full-cost provision for employers, but that it also recognises the importance of:
  - developing a good grounding in vocational learning for people entering the workforce for the first time, or making a significant career change
  - the need to enable companies to carry out problem-solving and R&D activity, which may then create a need for further training and development
  - encouraging a culture of learning and self-help among small companies
  - a clear and repeated signal from the LSC that the 'college for business' concept was central to their planning and future funding priorities
  - strong and consistent leadership from senior college staff
  - opportunities to consider and clarify the 'college for business' concept, and take part in its further development
  - the availability of external advice from LSDA to support the key staff in colleges and help them spread the ownership of the developments among other college staff.
- explicit inclusion of the gateway to the workplace 'pre-service' dimension, which enabled a wider range of college staff to see what the colleges for business concept may mean to their learners. Previous initiatives aimed at developing colleges' responsiveness to business have failed to bring about a culture change because they remained a marginal activity undertaken by few of the full-time staff in the college. The gateway to the workplace dimension requires all staff to consider how their learners can develop awareness of the world of work through their regular curriculum.

Ongoing issues

Issues that need to be resolved include:

- the relationship of this work to the COVEs initiative
- what is required to extend the work beyond the pilot colleges
- whether or not the concept is relevant to all colleges, and all departments within them
- the relationship between the colleges for business and the other providers of post-16 education and training
- whether colleges for business should be kitemarked, and if so what tests should be applied to their activities
- whether colleges in an area should form part of a network, and how this should link to the work of other regional agencies
- the implications of being a college for business for the ongoing strategic planning of each college
- the implications in the short and medium term for the functions and structure of Sussex LSC as the 'colleges for business' concept is rolled out.

Background and introduction

The FE sector has been an arena for rapid change and development over the past three decades. This is hardly surprising, given that the role of further education is to develop the workforce of today and tomorrow. The scope of the sector is very broad; it encompasses the end of compulsory education, with all the resulting demands of young people's transition to adulthood, and the updating of the current workforce in line with the needs of employers and the economy. It must therefore be at once grounded in contemporary concerns and also mindful of future needs.

There are (at least) three distinct markets for the FE sector:

- individuals, of all ages from age 14, but with perhaps clear differentiation between
  - young people at the 'pre-service' stage of development
  - adults in the workforce
  - individuals in transition – from school to work, unemployment to employment (and vice versa), and people changing jobs
- employers
- the national and local economy.

The needs of these clients may not always be compatible, and colleges need to juggle with competing priorities. Recent thinking about how further education is organised and delivered has suggested that it may not be possible to reconcile all these needs in every college. *Success for all*[3] reflects this thinking and makes firm proposals for greater differentiation of mission and explicit targets for securing greater employer involvement in vocational learning.

Against this backdrop, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has been exploring the shape and implications of greater specialisation in the types of organisations that develop and deliver vocational education and training. This work has included support for the development of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and the identification of Networks of Excellence in Wales, as well as proposing typologies for adult learning and a post-16 provider typology.[4]

The concept of the 'college for business' emerged from LSDA's policy development activity and was first proposed publicly in an LSDA presentation at the 2001 Employer Skills Summit: skills thinktank. The concept was picked up by the Sussex 'Blue Skies Group', which includes college principals in Sussex, Sussex Enterprise (the business link for Sussex) and the local LSC, at a time when an extensive survey of the skill needs of employers in their area was being undertaken.

As well as demonstrating sectoral differences in the nature and extent of these needs, the survey showed considerable variations within sub-areas of the county. With regard to the economy generally, some areas were among the most prosperous in the country, while another had one of the lowest levels of income per head. Both kinds of finding indicated the importance of raising

the skill levels in the population. The LSC judged that with appropriate support FE colleges were best placed to address this need, though it was made clear that if they could not all meet the challenge other routes would be taken. A second study conducted by the local LSC showed that many colleges needed to develop both specific provision and their general infrastructure if they were to rise to this challenge.

Sussex LSC and LSDA have since worked together to develop the concept of the college for business further, and to pilot its implementation in three colleges.[5] The colleges have audited their provision against the criteria for colleges for business and as a result, the original concepts have been tested and extended.

This report charts the development of the 'college for business' concept and looks towards its application in practice. It provides commentary on lessons learned from the auditing and planning process and preparations for full implementation of the model in practice. It also provides an audit instrument for colleges wishing to assess their provision against the 'colleges for business' model (see the appendix).

Rationale for the 'college for business'

In the debate about skills supply and workforce development, demand is seen as the policy priority.[6] While stimulating demand is clearly very important, the extent to which supply influences demand should also be considered. Appropriate and attractive learning opportunities, which are affordable and easily accessible, could be a major factor in stimulating demand for learning. Indeed, planners and policy-makers are now keen to capitalise on the dynamic relationship of supply and demand as a powerful force for securing an appropriate supply of skills by means of effective workforce development.

Colleges have been repeatedly accused of being unresponsive to the needs of employers. Although they have proved that they can be responsive, it tends to be to the needs of individuals and is a reactive, rather than a strategic response, largely following funding steers. An analogy with manufacturing production could be used to describe the shift of emphasis that is required to:

- move from 'production push' – where providers increase their marketing in order to sell more of the same kind of provision, to 'demand pull' – where providers develop provision to meet contemporary needs of the economy, employers and the workforce. This development may sometimes be ahead of the awareness of the users of the service that such provision is necessary
- develop products, services and solutions for business – driven by business objectives, as well as courses, seminars and learning. This is a shift from an inventory-driven approach, where what is on offer largely depends on what has always been provided, or minor amendments to the current offer.

The critical factor is starting with the needs and interests of the customer.

A solutions approach

In common with developments in other areas of a modern economy, skills development requires a solutions approach. It needs the cost-effectiveness of large-scale provision along with the ability to adapt provision to meet individual needs. It also needs expert staff, who can develop new learning solutions as well as deliver them in a range of ways, and a robust but responsive, unitised qualifications system. Securing such flexibility may require more emphasis on diagnosis and assessment of requirements than on the delivery of training courses.

For this reason, five distinct dimensions of activity are suggested as important within the college for business:

- **gateway to the workplace:** where initial knowledge and skills will be developed. This may be defined by age, ie provision for 14–19 year olds on college or work-based programmes, but it could also include provision for HE graduates and returners to the workforce
- **adaptation and updating:** providing training for the current workforce to acquire new processes and adaptation to new technologies
- **problem-solving and innovation:** developing services to accelerate innovation or solve business problems
- **support networks for SMEs:** to support the exchange of ideas and good practice
- **an underpinning mission and infrastructure:** to support implementation of the model.

The first two dimensions are directly concerned with improving the achievement of relevant skills in both the long and short term, through more appropriate and accessible education and training. Problem-solving and innovation and support networks are important activities which colleges could develop to support business development, particularly in small and medium-sized companies. They are also key to stimulating derived demand for learning and enabling colleges to establish the necessary relationships with businesses to understand their needs.

Policy-makers and planners and other providers of support for business should acknowledge the strategic role of colleges in supporting business development and human resource development. Colleges for business should be distinguished by their focused mission, which clearly articulates a business-to-business relationship with employers and the local economy. They must demonstrate a continuing, rather than episodic, involvement with their local business community.

Developments within the Sussex LSC

Research into college responsiveness, undertaken for the Sussex LSC before the colleges for business pilot, indicated that colleges were generally not proactive in meeting the needs of local businesses. Although some colleges had dedicated business units, the interface between colleges and employers needed further development. Some companies and other providers of support for business saw colleges as unresponsive to their needs. While the Sussex colleges' principals saw the need to change this perception and had demonstrated their willingness to change, the colleges needed to prove that they could deliver responsive provision.

Sussex LSC considered that there was potential for colleges specialising in a focused business mission within each of the local LSC's sub areas, and that the 'colleges for business' concept provided a way forward. It was important that all concerned understood that the 'colleges for business' initiative was not simply about the development of specialist business units in colleges, but was concerned to develop a general awareness that employers and corporate clients are an important part of all colleges' missions. However, it was accepted that the scale of direct involvement in business-specific work may vary between colleges and within individual departments.

Sussex LSC therefore undertook a pilot project, with support from LSDA, which examined in detail the potential for developing three dedicated colleges for business within the Sussex area. These colleges have led the way for further development and have engaged in ongoing dissemination with their peers in the Sussex LSC area.

Criteria for business colleges

The 'colleges for business' concept has its roots in the traditional mission of FE colleges – where serving local business and industry was an explicit and key purpose. As such, the development in colleges that have maintained this focus may be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The five dimensions of activity within the 'college for business' model will resonate with many college staff. It is not suggested that colleges with a mission to serve business needs will provide an entirely different set of learning opportunities and services from the current mix on offer in most colleges. Rather it is a re-focusing of mission and purpose to ensure that the provision both develops employability for individuals and provides business and industry with the knowledge and skills they need to remain competitive.

Dimensions of activity within a college for business

The typology of the college for business suggests five dimensions of activity, each with a set of defining criteria. In practice, there is likely to be a fair

degree of complementary activity between these dimensions. However, our experience from the pilot phase of the initiative has indicated that attention to each of the dimensions is equally important.

The dimensions of a college for business are described below.

1 Gateway to the workplace

This dimension encompasses provision that develops initial knowledge and skills. It could be defined by age of the learners, ie for 14–19 year olds, or by life stages, ie entrants to the labour market, such as HE graduates and returners to the workforce. This dimension focuses on providing a robust grounding in the basic principles of a subject or vocational area, together with the development of personal attributes and interpersonal skills, and an awareness of the demands of the world of work. It provides a bedrock on which the capacity to cope with changing demands can develop. Provision in this area could include college or work-based programmes, and increasingly may involve partnerships with schools, as pre-vocational provision and work experience for 14–16 year olds develops as a result of the proposals in *Success for all.*[7]

To support this capacity, the college for business should provide:

- informed advice and guidance, facilitating appropriate choice and/or change of direction
- good induction and (re)orientation to the world of work
- diagnostic assessment related to vocational programmes and support for learning
- broad, accessible vocational curriculum, facilitated by expert practitioners, informed by needs of the economy and local labour market
- college-based and work-based routes to learning
- rigorous development of theory and its practical application
- planned and purposeful work experience
- Enterprise education and the development of business acumen
- careers guidance and placement service
- access to recruitment and job seeking services
- suitably qualified potential entrants to the workforce at a time that meets industry's demands
- progression (articulation) agreements with HE institutions to a range of HE provision, including foundation degrees
- advice on possibilities for further study
- opportunities for further study/flexible completion while at work.

2 Adaptation and updating

This dimension is concerned with the provision of training and learning opportunities for the current workforce to enable them to adapt to new processes and new technologies. In previous attempts to develop a more industry-focused FE service, this dimension may have been viewed as marginal and separate from the rest of the college. In the 'college for

business' model, adaptation and updating is a core function of the college, with an impact on college infrastructure and administrative procedures.

The college for business should support updating and adaptation by providing:

- identification of training and/or development needs services for companies
- information, advice and guidance on education and training provision for individuals and employers
- diagnostic assessment of company and individuals' skills gaps
- easy access to vendor training and qualifications, such as Cisco Academy Training and Microsoft MOUS
- customisation/tailoring and packaging learning programmes
- unit accreditation/progression
- flexible timing and location of training – 24/7/52 anywhere
- a range of flexible delivery methods
- services to small businesses, eg start-up, expansion, recruitment, diversification, in cooperation with others, such as the Small Business Service, LSCs, other providers, etc
- workforce development firmly linked to employers' business support needs
- support for progression and development for individuals in the workforce
- support for the development of basic skills in the workforce
- support for companies to develop their in-house training capacity
- management training, contextualised to particular businesses.

3 Problem-solving and innovation[8]

This dimension is concerned with the development of services to accelerate innovation or solve business problems. This activity should be interpreted broadly to encompass a range of services, other than training and training needs analysis, that help businesses to innovate and to improve performance through the application of research and existing knowledge. This dimension is critically dependant on the expertise of subject specialists in colleges and their ability to work with companies through action research and development.[9]

The college for business would support problem-solving and innovation in companies by providing services which:

- are based on problem-solving and action research
- emphasise the practical application of research findings
- produce timely and quick results at reasonable cost to the employer
- where appropriate, involve collaboration with others, such as professional bodies or HE institutions
- are used to inform the curriculum in the gateway and adaptation phases, to ensure it reflects current and future practice
- lead to demonstrable impact on the business
- provide support for testing or choosing equipment.

4 Support networks for SMEs

The college for business should be aware of the important role of small and medium-sized businesses to the local and national economy. This dimension would enable the college to play a vital role in supporting the exchange of

ideas and good practice between small companies. This may be coordinated across the LSC area, and will necessarily involve collaboration with other providers of support.

To be effective in supporting networks of 'learning' companies, the college for business will need to demonstrate:

- knowledge of companies and their needs within the college's vicinity
- awareness of the work and contribution of other providers of support
- good relationships with other supporters of businesses
- active participation in the business community, eg through membership, active participation in Small Business Clubs, Chambers, networks, etc
- dissemination of 'best practice' through peer support and opinion formers
- provision of information and impartial advice, eg arranging 'seeing is believing' visits, shadowing, mentoring, etc.

5 Underpinning mission and infrastructure[10]

The college for business needs to have an underpinning mission and infrastructure that support the implementation of the other dimensions. This will require attention to:

- mission and strategy
- the range and quality of staff
- administrative procedures, resources and accommodation
- learner support
- progression
- partnerships
- employer links
- transforming and extending partnerships.

Piloting the 'colleges for business' model

After preliminary discussions between the 'Blue Skies Group', Sussex LSC and LSDA, one college from each of the three sub-areas of the county was invited to take part in a pilot project to investigate the feasibility of the 'college for business' model.

Each college appointed a small project team and the three teams together with the LSDA research team and the LSC project manager met once a month as a project group to report on progress, share practice and develop the 'colleges for business' model.

It was decided at an early stage that each college needed to concentrate on what would be required to develop a college for business incrementally, by examining four curriculum areas in the pilot phase. These areas were selected in relationship to the Sussex LSC's priority sectors for development. They also represented a range of current levels of engagement in employer-related work.

LSDA produced draft criteria and characteristics for the college for business, based on the dimensions identified in the colleges for business typology. After consultation with the colleges and Sussex LSC, this was developed into an audit and development-planning instrument.[11]

The three colleges received consultancy support, but otherwise undertook at their own expense an initial audit designed to show how far they met the proposed criteria and where further development was required. Each college also maintained contact with one or two other colleges not involved in the pilot to keep them abreast of developments. The pilot colleges briefed their partner colleges about the audit process and their results.

The colleges produced costed implementation plans, based on the results of the audit, which identified key milestones against which progress will be assessed. The plans also described the staff training and development required. They indicated how existing resources could be deployed in support of the plan, and where additional resources were required. The LSC provided limited resources to enable the colleges to prepare their plans against tight deadlines adequately.

These plans will be taken into account when the LSC makes its own budget submissions and decides its allocation of resources.

Throughout the pilot phase, the project was supported by a steering group, which included the principals and senior project workers from each of the colleges, the LSC executive director, the LSC project manager, the LSDA research team, and a representative of Sussex Enterprise. This group met every six weeks, and was responsible for the general conduct of the project.

At the first stage of this process, a one-day conference for all the Sussex colleges was held, reiterating the national and local rationale for giving priority to this work, and indicating how this priority would affect future plans and the allocation of resources. This conference not only indicated the schedule and mechanism by which other colleges would be involved in the initiative, but also provided further stimulus for the involvement of all sections of the pilot colleges.

A second event was held at the end of the pilot phase, where the three pioneering colleges were able to share their findings and describe the process involved in the project to colleges entering the development in the second phase. A further four colleges are now engaged in developing the 'colleges for business' model across Sussex.

The auditing and planning process

Even colleges that are already very responsive to the needs of business and industry will find the establishment of a college for business a complex undertaking. The audit process enabled colleges to determine a starting point for the development, based on a firm body of evidence.

Each college undertook the audit process in a different way, but in all cases it was preceded by visits to all of the participating colleges by the project research team to ensure that everyone concerned understood the 'college for business' concept. These meetings were well attended by a range of staff with an interest in the project, and provided a valuable opportunity to explore the underlying principles of the initiative, and to air issues and concerns.

The project research team emphasised that:

- the audit instrument is primarily a device for identifying the extent to which the college (or sections of it) meet the criteria suggested for the 'business college' – it is a checklist rather than a blueprint
- detailed, disaggregated information is probably more useful than summarised information when producing the action plan – averages can conceal rather than reveal problems and possibilities
- frankness is important – there are no right answers and the audit should establish a baseline from which development can take place
- evidence and explanatory comments against each item are valuable in drawing up subsequent action plans.

The different approaches are described below.

Approach A
Staff from the relevant curriculum areas were taken on an away-day to kick-start the process. Workshops on this day made good progress towards completing the audit. Staff and sections needing more subsequent support were identified. Audit results were collated by the project manager who then presented them to the senior management team.

Approach B
Because of a recent merger, this college produced two audits for each curriculum area, in order to identify differences in culture and practice between sites. A member of the project team visited each section, but left them to complete the audit in their own way. Considerable differences in culture, assumptions, priorities and practice emerged. The different approaches and interpretations were left in the final document, to inform the development planning in different sections of the college. A particular effort was made to audit cross-college functions, including management information systems (MIS) and the principalship. Some employer perceptions were obtained through a telephone survey, as a check on the college views.

Approach C

A working group was formed, which included all curriculum directors and business directors. They looked at all college activity. Individual meetings with each member of the working group followed, undertaken by a small team that visited each section in turn. It was an iterative process that gave ownership and benchmarked provision across the college. The findings were then presented to directors, followed by discussion. The process revealed big differences between different curriculum areas. Some picked up the messages with alacrity, others were more cautious or even defensive. In some areas there was no history of business development. In others, links and activities that had existed had decayed in recent years. Others had particular strengths that could be built upon.

Features of these approaches

- An initial away-day for key staff can give the work momentum, help clarify the concept, and enable the initial work on the audit to begin with mutual support.

- On the other hand, care must be taken to ensure that differences between different curriculum areas in their attitude and situation are not lost. These can be important in making the subsequent action-planning realistic.

- Allowing each area of the college to complete the audit in its own way, without ongoing support except on request, can reveal current differences in practice, assumptions and priorities. It allows for development-planning, including staff development, to take account of these differences.

- On the other hand, the resultant material may not be as neat and tidy – or as ready for external scrutiny – as if a single coordinator had processed the results.

- Visits by an internal project team to each area of the college can enable a useful dialogue to take place from which both sides can learn.

- On the other hand, opportunities may be missed for different sections to learn from each other's practice and perceptions, and initiate culture change.

What the audits revealed

- In general, the 'adaptation and updating' dimension showed a better match with current provision than the other dimensions. In the 'gateway to the workplace' dimension the audits revealed that:

- clear progression routes into employment need developing
- some areas lack the work experience element
- most staff do not consider enterprise education relevant
- work-based routes need developing
- flexible completion is rarely possible
- better achievement and progression into work are required
- involvement of employers in curriculum design is limited.

- There was little evidence of problem-solving and innovation activity, and limited use of college facilities made by businesses. However, industrial placements for staff to develop research/project activity are seen as a way forward.
- Involvement in support networks for SMEs was patchy across the colleges, although approaches to developing this were suggested, including:
  - database of local employers
  - TNA/relationship marketing with employers
  - developing basic skills in the workplace provision.

In relation to the underpinning mission and infrastructure, the need to develop staff was seen as a priority in terms of:

- awareness raising of some staff
- updating in modern practices
- specific training in working with business
- ensuring that curriculum staff know more about the needs of business

- Links between 'corporate functions', such as strategic planning or learner support, and specific curriculum areas or target groups were not routinely made. This suggests a perception that such aspects are 'somebody else's responsibility', which may restrict their impact in relation to the expectations of a college for business.
- College systems and infrastructure needs to be mindful of the different needs of small businesses, and different arrangements for invoicing, payment, and so on that may be required
- Close links across all the five dimensions are becoming apparent, in that effective links to the world of work in the gateway are often the result of substantial involvement in updating. There may also be some correlation between good retention and achievement and effective employer links.
- While there are differences in the way the audits were conducted, all resulted in an honest appraisal of the current position. Often this is revealed in the language and tone of the respondents, rather than in the actual audit results.
- There is a big job to do in changing the college culture and winning 'hearts and minds'. The prevailing culture is based on serving the needs of individual students. Employers are not seen as 'customers'. Academic year restrictions still prevail in some parts of colleges. There is a need to secure a critical mass of the college to be 'signed up' to the 'college for business' concept.
- The need for proactive senior management support and involvement has been emphasised in all cases. Establishing a college for business must be a corporate undertaking, driven by the college board and senior management team.
- Financial investment will be required. Some colleges report good facilities and good technician support, but there is also call for a long-term plan to upgrade specialist equipment, and capital expenditure may also be required to upgrade facilities and plant.
- There is a need to relate provision more directly to LSC priorities – awareness and availability of labour market information (LMI) is not well

developed across the colleges. There is also probably a wealth of information that colleges already have, which is not collected and used systematically.

- Plans for the colleges for business development must be rooted within the strategic aims of the college with a strong link to the departmental operational plan.
- Curriculum specialists need to be brought on board, and to perceive that meeting the needs of employers and employees is their responsibility as well as that of the business development managers.
- Progressing the initiative will require substantial staff development – not just in awareness raising, but also the subject updating and the pedagogic practices needed for working in commercial environments. All staff could benefit from training in effective communications – especially as much work will need to be developed in collaboration with other parties.

The process of development-planning

The results of the audit provided the starting points for the college development plans. The curriculum areas for initial audit were influenced by the LSC's analysis of skill needs in the local labour market, but were also selected to illustrate different stages of development in working with employers.

The colleges defined a number of priorities for development in each curriculum area, and others that related to the underpinning mission and infrastructure.

Examples of priorities in specific skill areas included:

- the re-equipment of facilities to provide both realistic working environments for students, and a credible location for trade displays and updating workshops for SMEs
- the appointment of industrial liaison officers
- support services for company-based Modern Apprenticeships, dealing with planning, administration, funding, etc
- practical 'taster' programmes for 14–16 year olds to inform them of opportunities in specific occupations
- a project team to carry out construction work in the community, to provide realistic working environments and promote interest in the subject area
- the creation of specialist modules (eg in drainage and kerbing) with the intention of adding to the skills of the workforce to meet shortages, and provide an option module for full-time students
- provision of a vehicle with which to take information and communications technology (ICT), basic skills and key skills diagnosis and training into the community
- creation of new workshops in plumbing and motor-vehicle crafts to fill in geographical gaps in provision
- targeted courses for union learning representatives
- diagnostic and support services for basic skills in the workplace.

Examples of priorities for cross-college development included:

- the development of employer databases
- the establishment of a recruitment agency to link college students with local employers
- an industrial placement service to coordinate student placements as part of their full-time courses and to implement a policy of regular placements for all relevant teaching staff.

For each activity, costings, time-scale and lead responsibilities were specified, and measurable outcomes identified in terms of:

- improvements in provision
- benefits to local companies and the labour market.

Links were also made to the college's existing plans and objectives. In some cases funding is planned to come from a reorientation of current plans (for instance, staff recruitment and training, new building), in others the development plans form the basis for a bid to the LSC, with detail that would allow the local LSC either to prioritise its planned budget or itself to bid for additional funding to meet defined objectives.

In all cases, colleges used a combination of proposals from individual curriculum areas, and some from central services. An individual or small team then edited and coordinated the plans, sometimes with the support of an external consultant. One college informed its plans with commissioned, independent market research, which trawled the views of local companies on their experiences of approaching or using the college, and the image it had in their community.

Outstanding issues

Despite the effectiveness of the model and the audit instrument, there were problems, as described below.

- Misunderstanding of the 'college for business' concept led to the tendency, particularly among staff and managers who were not centrally involved in the project, to equate colleges for business solely with the provision of full-cost short courses for employers.
- Linked to this, it was sometimes thought that business development units could be given the sole responsibility for the necessary developments.
- Staff who had spent the past few years being pressed to deliver full-time courses for 16–19 year olds more efficiently and effectively, often in competition with local sixth forms, sometimes felt that the shift in focus suggested by the 'college for business' concept might distract from this, and even damage the progress they had made.
- Because the 'college for business' concept required changes in both mindsets and procedures, it could be difficult for staff to keep the definition and focus clear under the day-to-day pressures of current college activity.
- The same pressures made it difficult to find the necessary time to:
- raise the awareness of staff across the college
- conduct the audit

- prepare a development plan and ensure that it formed part of the overall college planning procedures.
- The audit instrument seemed daunting at first sight, and help was sometimes needed in interpreting it.
- Regular reiteration is needed that the 'colleges for business' concept is not solely concerned with developing full-cost provision for employers but also recognises the importance of:
- developing a good grounding in vocational learning for people entering the workforce for the first time, or making a significant career change
- enabling companies to carry out problem-solving and R&D activity, which may then create a derived need for further training and development
- encouraging a culture of learning and self-help among small companies.
- a clear and repeated signal from the LSC that the 'college for business' concept was central to their planning and future funding priorities
- strong and consistent leadership from senior college staff
- opportunities to consider and clarify the 'colleges for business' concept, and take part in its further development
- the availability of external advice from LSDA to support the key staff in colleges and help them spread the ownership of the developments among other college staff.

Ongoing issues include:

- the relationship of this work to the COVE programme
- what is required to extend the work beyond the pilot colleges
- whether the concept is relevant to all colleges, and all departments in them
- the relationship between the colleges for business and the other providers, and whether some of these need to focus their mission in other specialist areas, such as community development or sixth form studies
- whether colleges for business should be specially kitemarked, and if so what tests should be applied to their activities
- whether colleges in an area should form part of a network, and how this should link to the work of other regional agencies
- the implications of being a college for business for the ongoing strategic planning of each college
- the implications in the short and medium term for the functions and structure of Sussex LSC as the 'college for business' concept is rolled out.

Future developments in the Sussex LSC area

All the general FE colleges in the Sussex LSC area are now developing their provision in line with the 'colleges for business' model. Each college will lead on a given range of specialist areas, in line with the LSC's priorities for economic development.

All the colleges will continue to receive support from the project research team. In addition, Sussex Enterprise is to assist in the development of a brokerage service, which will promote and encourage more employers to take advantage of the services provided by the colleges. A contacts database for all the colleges is to be developed and managed by Sussex Enterprise.

LSDA is to provide support for the development of a system of verification or kitemarking of a college for business, which will include external tests of the audit findings.

Most importantly, the three pilot colleges will begin the full implementation of their development plans from the summer of 2003.

Lessons learned and implications

Scope of the initial audit

The pilot colleges began by auditing the activities of four curriculum areas, chosen both to reflect the priorities for skill development identified by the LSC and to represent areas of the college that were at various stages of development. It was anticipated that the audit would show that some areas already provided examples of good practice, while others would require more substantial development work if they were to make an effective contribution.

At the same time it is also important to:

- audit the performance and focus of cross-college services that provide the underpinning infrastructure for a college for business
- see the initial audits as the start of a bigger process that will eventually involve the whole college.

This is not to say that the whole of a college as it currently exists will eventually form part of the college for business. The audits may show that some sections have so far to go that local firms would be better served by deriving their support from equivalent sections in another college.

The importance of the gateway dimension

While all the dimensions of the 'colleges for business' model are important, the explicit inclusion of a 'pre-service' dimension enabled a wider range of college staff to see what the 'colleges for business' concept may mean to their learners. Previous initiatives that aimed to develop colleges' responsiveness to business failed to bring about a culture change because they remained a marginal activity undertaken by few of the full-time staff in the college. The gateway to the workplace dimension requires all staff to consider how their learners can develop awareness of the world of work through their regular curriculum. This is likely to have a beneficial effect on staff awareness and links with local employers.

Timing

There is no right time to conduct the audit, and to wait until staff are free of other pressures will be to wait for ever. Ideally, the pilot colleges would have preferred to start the work after the September rush was over, perhaps starting in mid-October. In terms of how to long to allow for the audit to be completed, there is a balance to be struck between the time required to collect evidence and fully evaluate current provision, and the importance of establishing momentum. Eventually the audit should be incorporated in to the college's annual review process, but initially a special initiative for a period of about three months may be required.

The formative nature of the processes

It proved to be vitally important to secure time for discussion, clarification and amplification of the 'colleges for business' model and concept with the team from the pilot colleges, and during the conferences and meetings with other colleges. This avoided a 'done to' approach, and should have resulted in the development of a concept rooted in reality.

Involvement in the auditing and planning processes is not a one-off event. It is a way of enabling staff to understand the concepts and principles, and it must be expected that initial plans will need annual modification in the light of better evidence becoming available and of changes in the college and the local business environment.

Also, it must be expected that the concepts underlying the 'college for business' will themselves need to be reviewed and developed, as will the audit instrument.

Planning for development

Implementing such a radical change in purpose and function needs planning, and it may be useful to regard this as having three aspects:

- development of new provision and services
- development of the college mission and infrastructure
- evolution of the college culture.

Establishing a culture change may take years, but can also be a staged process – starting with those who already have the best understanding and working to achieve a critical mass of staff signed up to the change of focus, whose actions reflect this.

Cross-college support services are vitally important – both in setting the tone of an organisation (they are often the first point of contact) and in re-vamping the administrative and support services necessary to become a college for business.

Within specific curriculum areas, there may not be a match between those that are in the best state of readiness for development and those whose

expertise is most relevant to the needs of the local economy. On the other hand, well-developed areas and those with ideas and initiative can provide valuable models for others. The process of auditing and development-planning can enable good practice to be identified and shared.
Colleges may identify a priority list for what needs to change in the short, medium and long terms. This will obviously form part of the overall college strategic planning process, and will need to be agreed in partnership with the local LSC.

It could be useful to have an 'employer champion', possibly a member of the college corporation, who could review progress and advise on impact in the business community. The process can also be very valuably informed by regular 'customer satisfaction' surveys of local companies, asking about the experience of contacting the college, and its image with them, as well as about specific provision.

Implications for overall college strategic planning

Creating the college for business will require the production of a critical path of development activity. What changes does the college envisage over the next three years? Do some changes depend on each other, and is there a necessary sequence to be followed? What can be done quickly (for example changes in bureaucratic systems) and what will take longer (for example providing new premises)?

There will be a need for an overall vision, as well as ongoing amendments and adjustments. It may be more useful to the business community if the majority of their needs are met quickly, rather than striving for a perfect service that does not materialise in time. This will be understood if it is explained, and assurance given about ongoing improvements.

The overall development plan will sometimes provide a case for additional resources to meet needs, but it may also be possible to re-orient existing expenditure to match the 'college for business' model better. The additional resources may come from public funds, if a good enough case can be made, but may also come from companies themselves if they can be shown how their own productivity and efficiency can be improved.

In general, therefore, the strategic plan will need to show not just how the college's own objectives will achieved, and what indicators will demonstrate this, but also the predicted effect on local firms and the local economy.

Implications for the LSC

If colleges for business are to become a sustained and effective part of the local scene, this has implications for the LSC in terms of:

- internal structure
- ongoing support for colleges
- links to other LSC functions
- the need to avoid unintentional mixed messages.

Just as colleges will need to ensure that their staffing and structures enable them to give this innovative work appropriate priority, so will the LSC have to keep its own capacity under review if its actions and responsiveness are to match the rhetoric. Colleges will need help in developing their own capacity, while being held to account for their performance. Internal links between a number of LSC functions will need to be effective, if a consistent policy is to be developed.

A more difficult task for the LSC might be ensuring that other actors on the local and national scene also maintain a consistent approach, allowing colleges to provide and sustain a service of increasing quality to business.

Historically, governments have failed to define a clear and consistent role for colleges, which is why the difficult area of support for the business community has either not developed as it should, or has even diminished in recent years. Making the necessary changes can be both psychologically and financially risky, and momentum will be lost if the demands made on colleges are unnecessarily conflicting.

The DfES has other important priorities for further education, including collaboration with schools 14–19, basic skills, and widening adult participation for reasons of social inclusion. Other agencies, such as Sector Skills Councils and Regional Development Agencies, also have an important role to play and responsibilities to exercise. The local LSC could perform a valuable role in ensuring that these different perspectives are mutually supportive, and in providing feedback to the centre if in some localities they appear not to be so.

Such coordination and collaboration would help colleges see themselves as partners in the planning process that is the responsibility of the LSC. New provision will need to be developed, and this is likely to happen more quickly and effectively if undertaken in partnership, and if colleges agree how responsibilities for some areas of work are to be divided between them.

Regular curriculum reviews in colleges should be undertaken in tandem with LSC's analysis of labour market information. There will need to be college representation on LSC groups as well as LSC representation on curriculum review groups.

Labour market information should not just come down to colleges. Colleges can also be used to gather customer information that informs area planning. What provision is proving popular, or not being taken up, and why? Are new forms of economic activity or training needs developing in small firms that do not yet appear on the regional radar? What are firms proving willing to pay for, what can they be educated to fund and what appears to require subsidy? What does this say about any differences between employer opinion and employer behaviour?

Databases and brokerage

The individual learner record provides an invaluable set of data with respect to individuals. There is not yet an equivalent employer database, which in itself suggests that the system as a whole has not yet reoriented itself to regard firms as customers in the same light as individuals.

Sussex LSC is using Sussex Enterprise to produce such a resource, developed from its existing database, and this will enable it also to provide a brokerage service, putting companies in touch with colleges that can provide appropriate support. Useful though this will be, it does not replace the need for direct business-to-business relationships between individual colleges and employers. Such a relationship provides colleges with direct feedback about needs and whether what they offer is fit for purpose. It could also inform the central database, which will of course need continual updating. It would, however, be wasteful if colleges all developed their own overlapping and unconnected databases.

Quality assurance

Just as an under-performing department can undermine the reputation of the whole college, so an unresponsive or ineffective college could damage the image of colleges in general among the local employer community. This has raised not only the question of the relationship of this work to the college self-assessment report, but also whether there should be some kind of kitemarking or accreditation system for colleges for business if they are to form part of a local network. Analogies with Investors in People have been suggested.

It will also be important to ensure that employer engagement is better reflected in the interpretation and application of the Common Inspection Framework, and that appropriate performance indicators are developed.

Ongoing evaluation

The colleges engaged in the development will need to develop their capacities, roles and effectiveness further. This should be viewed positively, if the necessary processes are kept under review, and it is accepted that all involved will be learning. The 'colleges for business' model described in this paper, and its use in helping appropriate developments to take place, will itself need to be evaluated further, and doubtless changed. The model is attempting to bring about the modernisation of the FE service, and is a significant and long-term undertaking.

Appendix: The audit tool

Audit framework

A Gateway to the workplace

1 Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it
2 Statistical data
3 Assessing quality of provision
4 Criteria for gateway to the workplace

B Adaptation and updating

1 Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it
2 Statistical data
3 Assessing quality of provision
4 Criteria for adaptaton and updating

C Problem-solving and innovation

1 Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it
2 Track record
3 Assessing quality of provision
4 Criteria for problem-solving and innovation

D Support networks for SMEs

1 Current activity
2 Potential to extend support networks
3 Assessing quality of provision
4 Criteria for support network for SMEs

E Mission and infrastructure

1 Mission and strategy
2 Staff
3 Administrative procedures, resources and accommodation
4 Learner support
5 Progression
6 Partnerships
7 Employer links
8 Transforming and extending practice

SUSSEX LSC Colleges for business

learning and skills development agency

Rationale for the business college

Sussex LSC is working with its FE colleges to develop greater responsiveness to the needs of employers and the local economy. Stimulating demand for workforce development is seen as a major policy objective. This demand for learning may be influenced by the appropriateness of what is on offer. There therefore needs to be a concerted effort to develop colleges' capacity to deliver appropriate and attractive learning opportunities, which are affordable and easily accessible by employers and their workforce. The Sussex Colleges for Business initiative seeks to achieve synergy between the dynamic relationship of supply and demand as a force for securing an appropriate supply of skills underpinned by effective workforce development.

Delivering skills development for a modern economy requires a solutions approach rather than a pre-determined menu of courses. Responsive provision requires the cost-effectiveness of mass customisation, where adaptations to provision can be assembled from stock so that individual needs are routinely met. Securing such flexibility will require effective diagnosis and assessment of needs. It also needs expert staff who can develop new learning solutions as well as deliver them in a range of ways, and a robust but responsive, unitised qualifications system.

While there is an urgent need to improve the skills levels of the current workforce, the 'Colleges for business' initiative also sees the importance of developing a good grounding in vocational learning for people entering the workforce for the first time, or making a significant career change, and for enabling companies to carry out problem-solving and R&D activity, which may then create a derived need for further training and development. The development of a culture of learning and self-help among small companies is also seen as a vital role of the college for business.

The colleges for business model therefore has five defined dimensions:

- **gateway to the workplace:** where initial knowledge and skills will be developed. This may be defined by age, ie for 14–19 year olds, but could also include HE graduates and returners to the workforce
- **adaptation and updating:** providing training for the current workforce to acquire new processes and adaptation to new technologies
- **problem-solving and innovation:** developing services to accelerate innovation or solve business problems
- **support networks for SMEs:** to support the exchange of ideas and good practice
- **underpinning mission and infrastructure** – to support the implementation of these roles.

In practice, there is likely to be a fair degree of complementary activity between these dimensions. However, our experience from the pilot phase of the initiative has indicated that attention to each of the dimensions is equally important.

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Audit framework ◆ *Guidance notes*

- The audit framework is intended as a guide, not a blueprint, and you may need to interpret the information you have to hand or adapt the framework to make the audit manageable.
- Your analysis of the volume and quality of work that embodies the concept of 'colleges for business' should help to identify the college's priority areas for development. We are aware that these areas may not easily be categorised by title or area of learning, so please give a brief description of the area as well as a title.
- The audit may be undertaken in a variety of ways. You may find it appropriate to work on a cross-college basis with specific input from staff involved in particular areas of the college, such as student support and guidance, the business unit, the MIS officer and particular curriculum areas. It would be useful to meet the people concerned, either individually or in a group, to discuss the rationale for the enquiry and identify help they can provide to you.
- Honesty is important when conducting the audit, as this will enable the college to make decisions about its priorities for development. But we are aware that you may need to give 'best estimates' in relation to the statistical information, as the information you hold may not be in the form that the audit framework suggests. Remember that the reason for asking questions about numbers and volume of provision is to give an indication of the college's current capacity in relation to the 'college for business' concept.
- The mission and infrastructure-related criteria apply to all the 'colleges for business' activity. Try to comment on these from the perspective of the services and provision in each of the four aspects of the 'colleges for business' model, eg How are learners on work-based routes supported to improve their key skills?
- Further guidance notes are provided in the relevant sections throughout the audit framework.

College name and details:	
Name and details of person completing the audit:	

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DEVELOPING COLLEGES FOR BUSINESS IN SUSSEX LSC
Audit framework

A. Gateway to the workplace

(where initial knowledge and skills will be developed. This area may be defined by age of the learners ie for 14–19 year olds, but could also include HE graduates and returners to the workforce)

1) Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it[12]

i. Short term

ii. Long term

3

3

2) Statistical data

Enrolments:	2001–2002	Anticipated change as a colleges for business	Retention/achievement rates	2000–2001		Anticipated change as a college for business	
				R	A	R	A
i. Overall 16–19			i. 16–19 overall				
ii. % of these on vocational provision[13]			ii. For 16–19 vocational provision				
iii. Overall adult provision			iii. Adult provision overall				
iv. % of these on vocational provision			iv. For adult vocational provision				

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3) Assessing quality of provision

While the audit is mainly concerned with identifying the college's capacity to provide appropriate 'business to business' provision, it is also important to consider the quality of the provision. We are aware that not all of the activities described in the 'colleges for business' concept will be covered by college inspection reports. We have therefore suggested some alternatives to these in relation to **Adaptation and updating** (B), **Problem-solving and innovation** (C) and **Support networks for SMEs** (D).

Please provide information about the quality rating given in the most recent Ofsted or ALI[14] Inspection of your provision

Area of learning	Inspection grade	Comments on the proportion of work which embodies the concept of the 'college for business'

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4) Criteria for gateway to the workplace

Your analysis of the volume and quality of work that embody the concept of the 'colleges for business' should help to identify the college's priority areas for development. We are aware that these areas may not easily be categorised, eg by title or area of learning, so please give a brief description of the area as well as a title.

Note: Sections A–D should be completed for each of the priority areas. You may also find it useful to complete section E specifically in relation to A, B, C and D, or you may consider section E in relation to the colleges support for business overall.

Please give a title and description for each curriculum area to be audited.

Gateway to the workplace	**Insert title of curriculum area:**

Please provide commentary and examples on the college's current performance on the following:	**In place/ needs dev-eloping**[15]	**Examples**[16]
The college provides:		
• informed advice and guidance, facilitating appropriate choice and/or change of direction		
• good induction and (re)orientation to the world of work		
• diagnostic assessment related to vocational programmes and support for learning		
• broad, accessible vocational curriculum, facilitated by expert practitioners, informed by needs of the economy and local labour market		
• rigorous development of theory and its practical application		
• planned and purposeful work experience		
• enterprise education and the development of business acumen		
• college based and work based routes to learning		
• careers guidance and placement service		
• access to recruitment and job seeking services		
• suitably qualified potential entrants to the workforce at a time which meets industry's demands		
• progression (articulation) agreements with HEIs to a range of HE provision, including Foundation Degrees		
• advice on possibilities for further study		
• opportunities for further study / flexible completion while at work.		

Comments:[17]

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B. Adaptation and updating

(where training to acquire new processes and adaptation to new technologies for the current workforce will be provided)

1) Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it[18]

i. Short term

ii. Long term

2) Statistical data re short course work, customised provision, work-based learning for employers (some of which may lead to qualifications), professional updating eg AAT, other commercial services

Volume of provision	2000-2001	Notes on titles/type of provision	Anticipated change as a college for usiness
Number of courses (or training days)		*eg the college provides a substantial amount of training in food hygiene in the ethnic restaurant in Brighton*	
Number of employees trained			
Number of companies/corporate clients			
Fee income			

Retention / achievement/ repeat business
Please comment on completion rates, achievement of qualifications, where applicable:

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3) Assessing quality of provision

i. any inspections of this provision (where applicable)

ii. any quality awards or kitemarks

iii. judgements and action plans resulting from your self-inspection report

35

4) Criteria for adaptation and updating

Your analysis of the volume and quality of work that embodies the concept of 'colleges for business' should help to identify the college's priority areas for development. We are aware that these areas may not easily be categorised by title or area of learning so please give a brief description of the area as well as a title.

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4. Adaptation and updating	Insert title of curriculum area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on current performance, using the criteria given below The college provides:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• identification of training and/or development needs services for companies		
• information, advice and guidance on education and training provision – for individuals and employers		
• diagnostic assessment of company and individuals' skills gaps		
• Easy access to vendor training (such as CISCO qualifications or Microsoft MOUS correct, but usually upper case		
• customisation / tailoring and packaging learning programmes		
• unit accreditation / progression		
• flexible timing and location of training – 24/7/52 anywhere		
• range of flexible delivery methods		
• services to small businesses eg start-up, expansion, recruitment, diversification, in cooperation with others, such as SBS, LSCs, other providers etc		
• workforce development firmly linked to employers' business support needs		
• support for progression and development for individuals in the workforce		
• support for the development of basic skills in the workforce		
• support for companies to develop their in-house training capacity		
• management training, contextualised to particular businesses.		
Comments:		

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C. Problem-solving and innovation

(where services to accelerate innovation, or solve business problems for companies will be developed. These services should be interpreted broadly to encompass a range of services, other than training and training needs analysis, that help businesses to innovate and to improve performance. Activities may include technical support, field testing (eg of animal foods), action research, market or customer surveys, the production of prototypes, project evaluation, environmental monitoring and audits)

1) Analysis of market need and the college's capacity to meet it[19]

2) Track record

Please note activity the college has undertaken in this area and potential to expand

3) Assessing quality of provision

i. any inspections of this provision (where applicable)

ii. any quality awards or kitemarks

iii. judgements and action plans resulting from your self-inspection report

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4) Criteria for problem-solving and innovation

Your analysis of the volume and quality of work that embodies the concept of 'colleges for business' should help to identify the college's priority areas for development. We are aware that these areas may not easily be categorised by title or area of learning so please give a brief description of the area as well as a title.

4. Problem-solving and innovation	Insert title of priority area :	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college provides development services for business which:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• were based on problem solving and action research		
• emphasise the practical application of research findings		
• produce timely and quick results at reasonable cost to the employer		
• where appropriate, involve collaboration with others, such as professional bodies or HE institutions		
• are used to inform the curriculum in the gateway and adaptation phase, to ensure it reflects current and future practice		
• lead to demonstrable impact on the business		
• provide support for testing or choosing equipment.		

Comments:

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D. Support networks for SMEs

(which will support the exchange of ideas and good practice between small companies. This may be undertaken in collaboration, or coordinated across the LSC area)

1) Current activity

2) Potential to extend support networks

39

3) Assessing quality of provision

i. any inspections of this provision (where applicable)

ii. any quality awards or kitemarks

iii. judgements and action plans resulting from your self-inspection report

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4) Criteria for support network for SMEs

Your analysis of the volume and quality of work that embody the concept of 'colleges for business' should help to identify the college's four priority areas for development which will be fully audited.

4. Networks of SMEs	**Insert title of priority area:**	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college supports effective networks of 'learning companies by demonstrating the following:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• knowledge of companies and their needs within the college's vicinity		
• awareness of the work and contribution of other providers of support		
• good relationships with other supporters of businesses		
• active participation in the business community, eg through membership, active participation in Small Business Clubs, Chambers, networks, etc		
• dissemination of best practice through peer support and opinion formers		
• provision of information and impartial advice, eg arranging 'seeing is believing' visits, shadowing, mentoring, etc		
Comments:		

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E. Mission and infrastructure

Our experience from the pilot phase of the initiative has indicated that the four primary dimensions of 'college for business' need to be underpinned by a supportive mission and infrastructure. The mission and infrastructure dimension has been subdivided into eight sections, each of which is an important contributor to the college for business development.

1. Mission and strategy	**Insert title of priority area:**	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• The business focus is strongly supported by college governors and management and the local Learning and Skills Council.		
• Supporting the learning needs of business is a firm focus of the college's mission and strategic plan.		
• The mission and strategy addresses the current and future needs of the economy.		
• There is a firm commitment to providing a sound preparation for employment, as well as up-skilling and re-skilling the workforce.		
• The college's business and administrative procedures promote a business-to-business relationship with local companies.		
• There is a commitment to collaborative and partnership working.		
• There is a commitment to equal opportunities and support for non-traditional users of education and training services.		
• The provision and services can be sustained in the long term.		
• There are strategies to develop and extend the provision and services and build on success.		
Comments:		

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2. Staff	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below Staff in the college:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• understand and support the business mission of the college		
• are highly skilled in their particular job role		
• maintain a strong focus on staff development and updating their specialist knowledge and performance, eg through industrial placements		
• are well qualified and up to date in their specialist areas		
• maintain close contact with modern industrial or commercial practices		
• effectively support learners and other business clients		
• include part-time staff and visiting lecturers still active in the specialist area		
• provide a high level of customer care.		
Comments:		

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3. Administrative procedures, resources and accommodation	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college provides, or secures access to:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• user-friendly and efficient systems of course application, in line with business requirements		
• clear information on the services and products available to business, and how these may be customised or adapted		
• efficient invoicing and payment systems		
• sufficient, up-to-date, industry-standard resources and equipment, either owned directly by the college or accessed through other means		
▪ use of its equipment and facilities by the business community		
▪ technical support to maintain equipment		
▪ appropriate and high-quality learning materials and ICT resources		
▪ appropriate learning environments that meet the needs of all learners		
▪ pleasant general and waiting areas, which may be distinguished by user group to take account of different preferences		
Comments:		

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4. Learner support	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college provides:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• a strong focus on initial assessment and individual learning plans		
• support for the needs of individual learners, especially in relation to meeting the competing demands of learning and earning		
• mediation, where appropriate, between learners and their employers		
• feedback on progress for employers who are supporting their employees on learning programmes		
• support to broaden participation by people disadvantaged in the labour market and to widen participation to include those not normally represented within the specialist area		
• excellent additional learning support, eg key skills, study skills, additional maths, ESOL, in order to ensure that learners' successfully complete their vocational programme.		
Comments:		

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5. Progression	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college demonstrates that:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• learners are supported at all stages of progression, including into jobs, by effective transition arrangements		
• active support is provided for clients to continue to further learning		
• progression and destinations data is collected and used to improve provision		
• repeat business is a performance indicator.		
Comments:		

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6. Partnerships	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college demonstrates that: • there is a willingness to develop and promote partnerships with organisations important to the delivery of the four main areas of activity of 'colleges for business' (ie gateway to the workplace, adaptation and updating, problem solving and innovation, networks of SMEs)	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• there are strong links in vocational education and training with schools, other colleges and providers and HE institutions		
• there is strong collaboration with SSCs and other external groups, eg SBS, TUC, Enterprise Agencies		
• there is a relationship to provision in neighbouring local Learning and Skills Council areas within the region.		
Comments:		

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7. Employer links	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college demonstrates that:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• it is meeting employers' needs: locally, regionally and/or nationally		
• employers are providing sponsorship and up-to-date teaching materials		
• employers are involved in the design and operation of courses		
• employers are providing work placements		
• employers provide information on skills and knowledge required		
• employers see the college as a source of expertise for training their workforce		
• there are established links with companies.		
Comments:		

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8. Transforming and extending practice	Insert title of priority area:	
Please provide commentary and examples on the current performance, using the criteria given below The college demonstrates that:	**In place/ needs developing**	**Examples**
• there is a commitment to disseminate and extend good practice and learn from others: - across the college - with other providers and partner organisations - with schools and HE institutions		
Comments:		

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Notes

[1] DfES (2002). *Success for all: reforming further education and training*. Department for Education and Skills.
[2] Chichester College, City College Brighton and Hove, and Sussex Downs College.
[3] DfES (2002). *Success for all: reforming further education and training*. Department for Education and Skills.
[4] Organisation of provision of post-16 education and training' LSDA, February 2003.
[5] Chichester College, City College Brighton and Hove, and Sussex Downs College
[6] Cabinet Office (2001). *In demand: adult skills in the 21st century*. Cabinet Office.
[7] DfES (2002). *Success for all: reforming further education and training*. Department for Education and Skills.
[8] The development of this service is described in a new LSDA publication *Further supporting business*.
[9] See *Researching for business* (LSDA forthcoming).
[10] A fuller description of this is provided in the audit instrument.
[11] The latest version of the audit instrument is provided in the appendix.
[12] You may find it helpful to refer to the Sussex LSC Sector and planning area briefs, which provide useful information on skills priorities.
[13] Throughout this document, vocational provision is taken to exclude A-level, AS level, GCSE and leisure courses.
[14] Or their predecessors (ie FEFC Inspectorate or Training and Standards Council).
[15] The examples you provide should reveal the extent of the activity, but you may also wish to use a scale, as follows: 1 = highly developed, 2 = well developed, 3 = not developed.
[16] This is not optional! Wherever possible, you should provide examples to indicate the scale and extent of the current performance.
[17] In all cases, please indicate how you undertook this element of the audit, and with whom you consulted, as well as general comments.
[18] You may find it helpful to refer to the Sussex LSC sector and planning area briefs, which provide useful information on skills priorities.
[19] You may find it helpful to refer to the Sussex LSC sector and planning area briefs, which provide useful information on skills priorities.

This publication is part of the LSDA collection *A basis for skills*. Each publication is available separately and the overview is on the LSDA website www.LSDA.org.uk in *Briefing*.

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